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CULTURE HISTORY

The earliest settlement in the area now called Wilmington occurred in 1638 when Swedish traders, soldiers, and colonists established the colony of New Sweden, and built a log-fort facing the Christina River at its confluence with the Brandywine River (Hoffecker 1977:15). The fort, known as Fort Christina was approximately three quarters of a mile east of the project area. The Dutch established their seat of government at New Amstel, about five and one half miles south of Fort Christiana. By 1655

the Dutch had assumed complete control from the Swedish colony. The English under the Duke of York assumed control from the Dutch colony in 1664, established their governmental center also at New Amstel, but renamed the town New Castle. When the colony was ceded to William Penn in 1682, New Castle was designated the county seat of the northernmost of Penn's "lower three counties". Although a number of Swedish and Dutch settlers chose to remain under English rule, "the Fort Christina settlement had nearly ceased to exist" by the 1730s (Hoffecker 1974:3).

In 1731 Thomas Willing laid out property lots for a town on land he had acquired from his father-in-law near the earlier Swedish Fort Christina (Wise 1980:1). At this time population was increasing in southeastern Pennsylvania and northern New Castle County (Lemon 1972:222), and Willing hoped to capitalize on the economic opportunities available by trans-shipping grain from these rural hinterlands to Philadelphia (Hoffecker 1974:4; Lemon 1967:526). The grid pattern of streets that Willing devised followed that of Philadelphia, but remained essentially a "plan on paper" until the mid-1730s (Hoffecker 1974:4; Wise 1980:2-3). In 1735 and 1736, however, a number of property lots were sold to William Shipley and others "who were not involved as land speculators, but rather who were tradesmen" (Wise 1980:3). A map of "Willing Town" dated 1736 (Map 3), reportedly prepared by Thomas Willing, shows 34 structures, suggesting that once people decided to settle in the town, construction progressed rapidly. The first residents were Quaker merchants, millers, and artisans, whose houses were built of brick (Hoffecker 1974:4;

1977:28). At this same time, the first grist mills were built along the swiftly flowing Brandywine River just northeast of town (Lemon 1972:146; Hoffecker 1974:5). Within a decade of its being laid out, Willing Town grew to contain approximately 70 houses (Scharf 1888:805) with a population of 610 individuals (Appendix 1, Table 1). In 1739 the town received in honor of the Earl of Wilmington, Chief of the Privy Council at this time, its borough charter which changed the town's name to Wilmington (Hoffecker 1974:5) and legally permitted markets and fairs to be held (Lemon 1972:138).

As the 18th century progressed, Wilmington's economy focused on shipbuilding, coopering, milling, and exporting flour and other products to Philadelphia, the West Indies, Ireland, and Nova Scotia, while importing such foreign goods as sugar, coffee, rum, Irish glass & linens, salmon, and other products (Hoffecker 1974:6-7; Scharf 1888:749-750). By the late 18th century, Wilmington was essentially a town of artisans and merchants a "miniature version of Philadelphia" (Hoffecker 1974:7):

"Home construction followed the Philadelphia fashion of three to four-story brick townhouses with rear gardens for the well-to-do and smaller wood or brick houses, sometimes duplexes, for the less wealthy. In contrast to later eras, the well-to-do did not congregate in any one section of town but lived near their work...Persons in mercantile pursuits preferred to live along Front Street, which paralleled the Christina or in the nearby Quaker Hill area...The small business district centered around lower Market Street, which ran perpendicular to the river. Artisan shops were scattered throughout the community, but specialized trades tended to congregate together in areas adjacent to the industries they served. Those engaged in ship-building settled near Front Street, while coopers abounded in Brandywine Village near the mills. Scattered clusters of Negroes lived at the edges of town on the least valuable lands...From their homes along Front Street, merchants could view the marshland that lay across the Christina

River; the east side of town, from the foot of the hill whose ridge runs along Market Street, consisted mainly of unoccupied lowlands. Just a few blocks west of Market Street, farmlands began in the midst of undulating hills." (Hoffecker 1974:7)

This portrayal of 18th-century mercantile Wilmington remained little changed until the 1830s and 1840s when innovations in transportation and manufacturing inaugurated the industrialization of Wilmington. The completion of the Philadelphia, Wilmington and Baltimore (PW&B) Railroad in 1837 had a serious impact upon Wilmington's shipping trade while at the same time creating "new opportunities for manufactures made possible by the use of steam power on land and sea" (Hoffecker 1974:17) and (Appendix 1, Tables 2-3). The route of the PW&B railroad entered Wilmington from the northeast, turning westward and paralleling the Christina River along Water Street, before turning southwestward and heading toward Maryland. The railroad depot was located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Water and Walnut Streets.

Within a short period of time several industries were established near the railroad and the river to take advantage of easy and inexpensive access to transportation for fuel, raw materials, and finished manufactured goods (Hoffecker 1974:17, 19, 27). "The most important industries in Wilmington's economy...in terms of both employment and investment were ship and railroad-car construction, foundry work, tanning, and carriage making" (Hoffecker 1974:19). By mid-century Wilmington's economic focus had shifted from the earlier 18th-century emphasis on processing and mercantile pursuits to an emphasis on manufacturing and transportation service (Hoffecker 1974:25).

As a consequence of the success of Wilmington's industries, population grew steadily throughout the 19th century. This increase was supplemented by a large immigration of various European groups (Appendix 1 Table 1). The increase in population density, the concentration of industries along the Christina River, and the need for workers to live near their jobs encouraged an increase in settlement density in the area, and initiated a process of social and physical segregation in land-use patterns. Research indicates that higher status individuals tended to reside in the elevated northwestern portions of the city, while lower status workers lived in "row upon row of...two-story brick homes on the low, flat east side near the factory district" (Hoffecker 1974:37).

By the end of the 19th century, "patterns of land use and occupations (Figures 1 & 2; Appendix 1, Tables 6-8), and sources of community leadership established in mid-century persisted" (Hoffecker 1974:111). After the economic depression in the mid-1870s, however, "several of the city's key industries were encountering stiff competition" (Hoffecker 1974:52). This situation was further aggravated by the economic depression in the 1890s, as the railroad car and shipbuilding industries declined due to an inability to keep pace with technological advances and changing market demands (Hoffecker 1974:157). In the two decades preceding 1910, Wilmington experienced a diminishing growth rate (Appendix 1, Table 1) as a result of economic difficulties.

In 1906, the du Pont family selected Wilmington as the head-

quarters for their company, and within a decade Wilmington's economic focus shifted from industrial manufacturing to corporate management (Hoffecker 1974:157,160).

"The land-use plans and social forms that had evolved in Wilmington under the impact of industrialization were swept away by further economic change. The shift of Wilmington's economic center from the factories along the Christina to uptown office buildings was only one in a series of changes that have shaped 20th-century Wilmington, including the introduction of the automobile, black migration from the south, and the decline of European immigration. The old predominantly blue-collar industrial city with its indigenous upper-middle class leadership was replaced by a city of white-collar workers, many of whom chose to live in the suburbs." (Hoffecker, 1974:160)

By the 1970s, when the environmental assessment for the proposed Wilmington Blvd. was conducted and the State began acquiring the right of way, the project area was densely built up, consisting primarily of semi-rehabilitated and deteriorated 19th-century structures. The majority of the buildings were residential structures built in the late 19th century which contained rooms or walk-up flats occupied by low or no income persons. Most structures were vacant and vandalized. Also in the area were several businesses catering to low-income and transient clientele e.g., a mission, two hotels, a diner, two taverns, two store-front churches, and the Greyhound bus terminal.

PREVIOUS HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

Previous historical and archaeological investigations within the city limits of Wilmington have been restricted to the areas of commercial redevelopment or road building. The projects took place between the period 1974 to the present. Presented